

# RUSKIN



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JOHN RUSKIN

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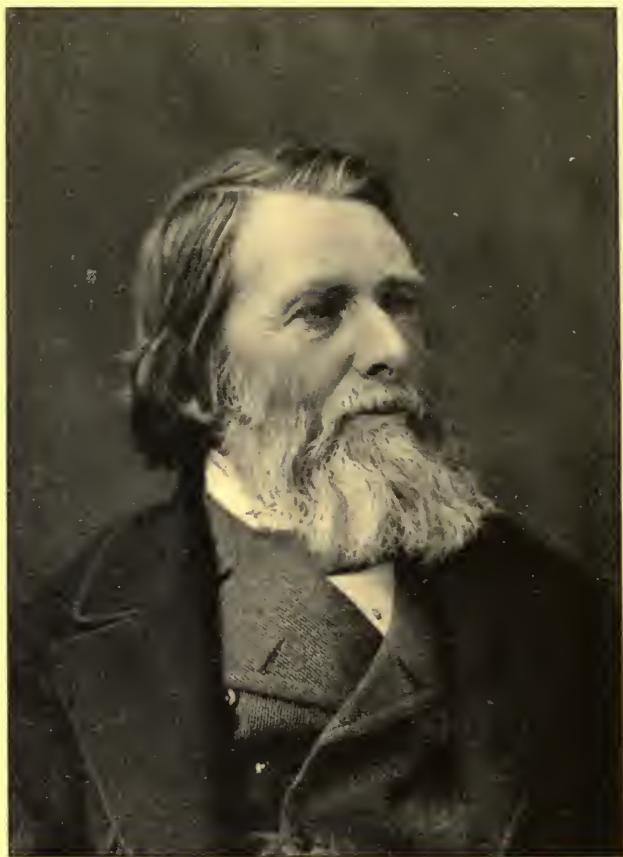
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JOHN RUSKIN





# JOHN RUSKIN

HIS HOMES AND HAUNTS

BY

JAMES D. SYMON


WITH TWELVE DRAWINGS IN CRAYON BY

W. B. ROBINSON

AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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## PREFACE

THIS essay is obviously an outline; it could not be otherwise when the story of eighty years had to be told in eighty pages. The reader will find little that is new save an anecdote here and there; but the treatment, as regards locality, has at least the freshness of its attempt to describe places and scenes not as they may appear to the independent observer to-day, but as they appeared to Ruskin himself.

The principal authority has therefore been the works of John Ruskin, in their compass. Quotations not directly acknowledged in the text are from *Præterita*. Elsewhere the sources are indicated. The author also acknowledges much valuable help from the biographical notes of Mr. Cook and Mr. Wedderburn in the Library Edition of Ruskin, as well as from the short biographies of Mr. Collingwood and Mr. Frederic Harrison. On many critical points he has consulted, always with illumination, even where complete agreement was denied him, the invaluable monograph of Mrs. Meynell, and that of Mr. J. M. Mather. In justice to himself, he may perhaps confess that these pages were passed for press before he read Dean Kitchin's "Ruskin at Oxford."

Cordial thanks are due to Mr. John Leith for his kindness in lending for reproduction a memorable letter of Ruskin's.

J. D. S.



# JOHN RUSKIN

## CHAPTER I

### PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD—HUNTER STREET AND HERNE HILL

AT the birth of John Ruskin, the Fates that spin the destinies of Art and Letters must have sung harmoniously to their spindles. For seldom has a man of genius been so favoured by fortune as the child who was born to John James Ruskin and his wife Margaret on February 8, 1819, at 54 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square. An only child, he was from the beginning marked out as one apart: his forbears were no ordinary people; his training was to be peculiar; above all, he was to be spared that which is at once the handicap and the spur of great abilities, a fight with adversity. He was, it is true, to become in after years a combatant among combatants, to fight gallantly for truth, and to pass away grieving that the complete victory he had sought was denied him; but in the early years no cloud obscured his growing powers. He grew up like some rare and curious flower in a garden closed and sheltered from the storms of the world, nurtured



certainly with a strange spiritual rigour, on his mother's part ; but that high austerity, unknown to the children of a more favoured age, was tempered and qualified by the humanity and culture of his father.

Between them, John Ruskin's parents exercised upon their son forces differing in degree and in direction, and the resultant was the critic and stylist. A third force was that of surroundings, in a merely topographical sense, and in a certain sense no other English writer has been so much the product and the expression of that which lay about his path. For the most part the dwelling-places of men of genius have been an accident ; for John Ruskin, as the event proved, they were an essential. It is said that "home-keeping youth has ever homely wits." John Ruskin, a home-keeper as few men have been, in the respect that he continued to live with his parents even until manhood was well advanced, managed to disprove the proverb. But this close tie to the parental roof and to the society of his father and mother, although a tether, was a tether of elastic that stretched first over England and Scotland, and afterwards across the continent of Europe. The Ruskins were the last to cling to the ideal method of travel, that of the post-chaise, and their gentle and joyous passages throughout the length and breadth of the land gave the boy a temper and an experience that are inseparably interwoven with his character. Ruskin is *par excellence* the English writer whose career and development are best illuminated by a study of his Homes and Haunts, and



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that is the theme and purpose of the present essay in little.

By birth a Londoner, John Ruskin was essentially a Scotsman by descent and early training. The heritage of his blood brought him in full measure the qualities and the defects of the Northern character, wherein natural breadth contends ever with an imposed rigidity. In his parents severally these characteristics were personified: the father a strenuous man of business, devoted to the arts and somewhat nebulous in his religion; the mother of the straitest sect of the Evangelicals, but with a certain gracious, if somewhat restricted, enthusiasm for the gentler flowers of the mind. She had striven during the long years of her engagement to make herself the fitting companion of the man she was to marry, a man whose education was superior to her own, and the Fates had ordained that that effort of hers was to find a strange issue in moulding the mind of a boy who was afterwards to write his name indelibly on the page of English Literature and on the artistic development of the world. There are some who have held that Mrs. Ruskin's methods are open to criticism, but surely her wisdom is justified of its child? Her rigorous instructions in the text of the English Bible may sound terrible to this age, but they laid the foundations of that sense of language which framed the melodious close of Ruskin's periods. To the Authorised Version he owed more than to disorganising Gibbon or judicious Hooker. But when all is

said and done, models and masters play but a secondary part. "The style," as Buffon did *not* say, "is the man himself." It is with the man that we have here principally to do.

Like most Scotsmen of account, John Ruskin had a pedigree. It is interesting, but too elaborate, too full of side issues to be detailed here. There is a remote link with the Sir Andrew Agnew of the memorable speech at Dettingen, another with Ross the Arctic explorer, but these scarcely count in any explanation of his heredity. What is to the point is that he was the son of a man whom he described as "an entirely honest merchant," when he came to write his epitaph, and the grandson of a woman of extraordinary force of character. Ruskin sprang of commercial ancestry on the father's side, and of seafaring people on the mother's. That he came of the commercial classes he tells us with a conscious candour worthy of Evan Harrington. Harringtonesque, too, are his reminiscences of an aunt who kept a baker's shop in Croydon. The confession is made with just that little excess of geniality which betrays effort. With equal candour, in the same book, he avows himself all for aristocracy, though in no sense an aristocrat. No more need be said. Let this glimpse of an amiable foible suffice.

Ruskin's grandfather was an Edinburgh wine-merchant of good position, afterwards lost by imprudence. His father, John James Ruskin, was educated at the High School of Edinburgh, under the famous Dr. Adam. He received that excellent sound old classical



Raskin's  
Birthplace  
54. Hunter St.,  
Brunswick Sq.





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training which in those days of no specialisation fitted a boy alike for the university or for business. Had his father continued prosperous, J. J. Ruskin would doubtless in due time have become an Edinburgh student, for he showed a strong bent for Latin and philosophy; but the family affairs had gone wrong, or were going wrong, and young John James went into business. It was fortunate that he did so, for his commercial success enabled him to surround his son with those affluent influences which suffered his genius to develop along its own lines. A place was found for the elder Ruskin in a wine-merchant's office in London. There he spent two years, and in 1809 he entered into partnership with a Mr. Telford, a wealthy squire of Kent, and a M. Domecq, a great grower of sherry. Telford, as Mr. Collingwood notes, contributed the capital, Domecq the sherry, and Ruskin the brains.

For nine years, taking no holidays that were not business journeys, J. J. Ruskin exercised those brains in putting his firm on a sound basis. His sensitive honour had made him resolve to pay off all his father's debts before he would lay by a penny for himself. When that was accomplished, he went north to claim the girl who had been his betrothed during all the years of his servitude. Margaret Cox was his cousin, the daughter of a Yarmouth skipper. For a long time she had lived with J. J. Ruskin's mother in Edinburgh, whither she had gone on the marriage of his sister. Her own mother, the skipper's widow, kept the old King's Head Inn in Croydon Market-place, and had

done her best for her daughter's education. Even when J. J. Ruskin declared himself in a position to marry, Margaret would have delayed ; but one evening he persuaded her to get married at once in the Scotch fashion, and next morning the pair left for London. On this happy despatch hung great issues.

Memory awoke early for the child John Ruskin in his first home, that Hunter Street house where he began to construct the world for himself. His picture of his childhood is that of a solitary, somewhat over-disciplined little boy, who was always summarily whipped if he cried, did not do as he was bid, or tumbled on the stairs. He had few possessions, and was taught abnegation early, never being permitted for one instant to hope for the possession of such things as one saw in toy-shops. A bunch of keys in early infancy, a cart and a ball when he was older, two boxes of well-cut bricks when he was five or six, were his "entirely sufficient possessions." Almost as soon as he could remember, he had learned to cultivate the pleasures of the imagination.

"I would pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and colours of the carpet, examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite houses ; with rapturous intervals of excitement during the filling of the water-cart through its leathern pipe from the dripping iron post at the pavement edge, or the still more admirable proceedings of the turncock, when he turned and turned until a fountain sprang up in the middle of the street."

The sense of form, however, was his chief resource, and he sought patterns in the carpet, in bed-covers, dresses, and wall-papers. The critic awoke in the contemplation of the carpet, and when he was only three and a half he asked Mr. Northcote, the Royal Academician, to whom he was sitting for his portrait, why there were holes in his carpet. But the sense of colour was awake also, for when the artist asked the child what he would like for a background, he replied at once, "Blue hills," thus presaging not only the future master of colour, but the passionate lover of mountains, alike in their picturesque and their scientific significance. He was rewarded by the introduction of two rounded hills "as blue as his shoes."

Already the little Ruskin's horizon had stretched beyond a Bloomsbury street. Holidays spent with the Croydon relations had given him his first impressions of a South London still rural and beautiful, that was soon to be his home for many years to come. There were walks on Duppas Hill and on the heather at Addington, and sometimes the family took lodgings with a Mrs. Ridley at Dulwich, in a house that was "the last of a row in a lane which led out into the Dulwich fields on one side, and was itself full of buttercups in spring and of blackberries in autumn." He knew Hampstead also, where they lived in "real cottages, not villas so called." Of his moral training at this remote period he remembered chiefly his mother's steady watchfulness to guard him from all pain and danger; her willingness to let him amuse

himself as he liked, provided he was neither fretful nor troublesome. Her rigour was seen in her restriction of toys of which she disapproved. A "most radiant Punch and Judy," the gift of his less austere aunt, was accepted, but afterwards removed, with an intimation that it was not good for him to have them. They were never seen again. How strange, yet in a way how salutary, is this to an age that has accepted the Golliwog and the Billikin, the former innocent and pleasing enough, but the latter anathema!

But these were insignificant travels: for the child in his fourth summer had seen and learned to love Scotland. His father's sister Jessie was married to a Mr. Richardson in Perth, and in his aunt's house at Bridge End beside the Tay, towards which the garden ran sloping steeply, the infant John Ruskin found new impressions, to be strengthened during later visits, and to be perfectly described in after-days in the pages of *Præterita*, that autobiography "written frankly, garrulously, and at ease."

"I would not change the dreams, far less the tender realities, of those early days, for anything I hear now remembered by lords and dames of their days of childhood in castle halls, and by sweet lawns and lakes in park-walled forest.

"Lawn and lake enough indeed I had, in the North Inch of Perth, and pools of pausing Tay, before Rose Terrace (where I used to live after my uncle died, briefly apoplectic, at Bridge End), in the peace of the fair Scotch summer days."



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On this head one more passage must be quoted, for the light it throws on the mind of the child, thus early susceptible to the influence of the "spirit of place":—

"I passed my days much as the thistles and the tansy did, only with perpetual watching of all the ways of running water,—a singular awe developing itself in me, both of the pools of Tay, where the water changed from brown to blue-black, and of the precipices of Kinnoul; partly out of my own mind, and partly because the servants always became serious when we went up Kinnoul way, especially if I wanted to stay and look at the little crystal spring of Bower's Well."

Thus, like the gods in the Euripidean chorus,

"Ever delicately marching  
Through the most pellucid air,"

the soul of John Ruskin began its pilgrimage through a world to which he was to bring great and high teaching, at much cost to his own peace. But long, tranquil days of preparation were still before him, amid fairer surroundings than the fascinating bricks of Hunter Street.

In 1823, the year after the painting of the Northcote portrait, John Ruskin the elder had so far prospered in his business as to be able to think of a home in a pleasanter quarter. The family removed to a house with an ample garden on Herne Hill, afterwards known as No. 28. It was one of a group of four,

the highest blocks of buildings on the crest of the ridge, three-storied with garrets, commanding a remarkable view towards Windsor and Harrow. The garden was rich in fruit-trees, forbidden to the child, but afterwards to bear a rich literary fruit for him and for the world, in the principles laid down in "*Proserpina*," and even then early realised, that the seeds and fruit of them were for the sake of the flowers, and not the flowers for the fruit.

In that pleasant garden the boy spent most of his summer days; surely the weather must have been kinder then? Lessons had already begun, and as soon as he could read fluently his mother began a course of systematic instruction which nothing was allowed to interrupt. After his father had gone to town by coach, John was sent to his daily task, which he was expected to know by twelve o'clock. The text-book was the Bible, and a passage had to be learnt by heart. Again and again mother and son read the Scriptures from beginning to end, with minute attention to pronunciation and accent, until the lightest inflexion was perfect. This discipline, ended only when Ruskin went to Oxford, he counted the essential portion of his education. With the formidable chapters, strictly learnt by heart, his mother, as he himself says, "established his soul in life." Peace lay about him, in those days, and he learnt obedience and faith, also that habit of fixed attention with eyes and mind which long afterwards caused Mazzini to say that Ruskin had the most analytic mind in Europe.

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He notes, however, the defects of the method—"calamities," he calls them. Withal he had nothing to love, nothing to endure, no training in precision of etiquette and manners. The last cost him a quaint disquiet, humorously confessed in his account of his first love affair, and the serio-comic Disraeli episode at Christ Church.

The evenings at Herne Hill were no less remarkable than the mornings. Mr. Ruskin came home early, and while he dined his wife heard from him the events of the day. From these counsels the son was rigidly excluded, but in summer he joined his parents at tea-time in the garden, where the rest of the evening was spent. In winter or rough weather he had his bread and milk in the drawing-room, in a little recess, where he remained, like an idol in its niche, until bedtime, listening while his father read Scott or Byron. Before him was a small table, at which as he grew older he practised a marvellous literature. The Muses had caught him. He toiled at a conclusion of Miss Edgeworth's "Harry and Lucy," with copper-plates—"written by a little boy and drawn," is the artless legend of the title-page. His father's taste and skill in water-colour had roused him to emulation. But he aspired even higher. This child of seven, whom his mother had fondly dedicated to the Church, had already recognised a vocation. John Ruskin was to be a poet.

The growth of his little lyric gift, and its renunciation for the highest achievement in modern English

prose, lead us far away from Ruskin's childish days. But it remained the leading motive of his life until he stood upon the threshold of manhood. Let us follow him thither through that growing boyhood, upon which the shades of the prison-house seemed reluctant to close.

## CHAPTER II

### HERNE HILL AND EXCURSIONS

THE great event of the year for John Ruskin was his father's birthday, the 10th of May. For that occasion the small poet always produced a copy of verses, the subject of much anxious thought during the preceding weeks. But besides these special efforts he was continually busy with composition, which his parents encouraged. They made it, indeed, the means of earning pocket-money, a custom of doubtful wisdom. But the money at any rate was earned, for the child did not spare himself.

Nor were his labours wholly in the field of art. His passion for physical science had declared itself in his fondness for minerals, and on that theme he wrote learnedly. As for the reward—"Homer" fetched a shilling a page; "Composition," a penny for twenty lines; "Mineralogy," a penny for each article. His verses are wonderful for a mere child, but like the rest of Ruskin's poetry, even the maturer examples, they are little more than literary curiosities to-day. He imitated Scott, Byron, and Young with a quaint infusion of his own small observation and experience. The close transcript of the thing seen is



perhaps the most valuable sidelight the poems afford upon the mind of the author-to-be.

But the 10th of May had another significance. It marked the departure of the Ruskin family upon their annual tour through England. Their way frequently extended as far as Scotland. These leisurely journeys, made in a roomy post-chaise, fitted with all sorts of fascinating convenient devices, were undertaken as much for business as for pleasure, and in their course Mr. Ruskin called upon his chief country customers, always bearing away a substantial sheaf of commissions. This remarkable wine-merchant was welcomed everywhere for his personality, like the great Mel Harrington; but, unlike Melchisedec, he knew how to turn his popularity to sound commercial advantage.

To little John these travels were another education and an inspiration. He learned to know the countries of his birth and of his descent, and he reproduced his impressions in a continual stream of literary works. He kept journals, he composed itineraries, he celebrated the things he had seen in various verse. Perched on a little cushioned seat in front of his parents, he delighted in the wide unfolding view from the chaise windows, and caught by the equestrian spirit, he imitated the postilion, in mile-long imaginative gallops. To add to the realism of this pastime, patient Papa Ruskin allowed his own devoted legs to be whipped, "in a quite practical and efficient manner," with a silver-mounted riding-whip he had himself given to the boy.

## HERNE HILL—EXCURSIONS 15

The chronology of these early journeys is important. The first visit to Scotland was made by sea in 1822. In 1823 the summer tour lay through the south-west of England. In 1824 they went to the Lakes, Keswick, and Perth. In 1825 John made his first acquaintance with the Continent, and saw Paris, Brussels, and Waterloo, which last he afterwards sang in a dramatic poem. He was present during this tour at the coronation festivities of Charles X. In 1826, the year of his first poem, "The Needless Alarm," they were again at the Lakes and Perth. His first memory of life, he says, "meaning of things chiefly precious to me afterwards," was of Friar's Crag on Derwentwater, now marked by his monument. The limiting phrase is significant; for he had earlier memories, and it marks that passion for the hills, and above all his affection for that Coniston region, where he was at length to see an end of his labours. At the Coniston Inn, in those early days, he and his mother stayed, while his father went on his business journeys to Whitehaven, Lancaster, Newcastle, and other northern towns. Thus at large leisure, and under intelligent guidance, John Ruskin's apprenticeship went forward. Through an unspoiled England he came by easy stages to his life-work.

The year 1826 not only saw the dawn of poetry, but marked an epoch in Ruskin's formal education. It was now time to begin Latin. To that task Mrs. Ruskin was quite equal, and, with the same thoroughness that she brought to other lessons, she put her

son through the Grammar of Dr. Adam, using the very book that her husband had carried in his satchel to the High School of Edinburgh.

The summer of 1827 found the Ruskins again at Perth; next year they went to the west of England, and about that time the poet projected a great work, "Eudokia, a Poem on the Universe." In that year, too, Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin adopted John's Perth cousin, Mary Richardson, who was brought up as a sister to the boy. There was no extended tour in 1829, only a little sojourn in Kent. In the autumn of 1830 Ruskin was at length considered to have outgrown his mother's tutorship.

At that time there ministered in Beresford Chapel, Walworth, an excellent divine, whose oracles Mrs. Ruskin attended, accompanied, "contentedly or at least submissively" (says Ruskin in *Præterita*), by her husband. Dr. Andrews, who was the father of the first Mrs. Coventry Patmore, "had the reputation (in Walworth) of being a good scholar," so to him John was sent to learn Greek, already too long delayed. It appears that Dr. Andrews

"in Greek  
Was sadly to seek,"

his method was peculiar, not to say fearful and wonderful, but he accomplished one thing in which a more accurate scholar might have failed—he interested his pupil, who ever retained a wistful affection for Hellenic studies, although he was the first to confess his





W. D. Robinson  
Herne Hill Jan 1901

Ruskin House  
60-62 Herne Hill



lamentable deficiency in grasp of the language. In the sketch of his Oxford career, it will be seen how he suffered from the lack of proper training. Perhaps it did not matter much: the enemies of classical teaching will say that it was better so; but they misconceive, for Ruskin would have been infinitely helped by a thorough mastery of Greek, and it was impossible for him ever to have sunk into a mere pedant.

With Dr. Andrews he went on with his Latin, reading Virgil, and taking pleasure in his tutor's odd illustrations; in Greek he read Anacreon, before he knew his verbs, and of course he fell at once to verse translation. It was a happy-go-lucky, genial scramble up Parnassus, with more waggery afoot than sound learning on both sides; but the boy was delighted, and looked forward eagerly to the three days a week on which he worked with his desultory master. Some suspicion of the method entered Mrs. Ruskin's shrewd brain, but she could not be expected to put her finger on the place. She thought, however, that Dr. Andrews was "flighty," when, after six months, he proposed that John should begin Hebrew! Of Semitic studies we hear no more.

All this time Ruskin's interest in Art was steadily increasing. He tried to copy Cruikshank's illustrations to Grimm's Fairy Tales, his first serious beginnings in drawing. The "singular genius of Cruikshank" and his pictures, "perhaps the finest line-work since Rembrandt's etchings," he was always to hold in reverence, and he would have all beginners make this their first model.

Ruskin's work showed so much promise that his father now sent him to take drawing-lessons from Mr. Runciman, with whom he remained for several years. Runciman was a severe and somewhat opinionative taskmaster, but once at least he bowed to his pupil's independence, and actually modified his method, allowing him to use colour earlier than he would have done in the case of a pupil less extraordinary. In the same year, 1831, a mathematical master was engaged, and with him Ruskin got a firm hold of the elements of geometry, a subject which he really liked and in which he attempted a little original work of a romantic kind—the baffling tri-section of an angle.

But a greater influence was now at hand: the boy was to encounter a force in art that was afterwards to make his own career, and to rescue from obloquy and misunderstanding a once popular genius, who, reaching after a new expression of truth, had put himself of necessity out of favour with his countrymen. Ruskin's fourteenth birthday brought him a gift which was a revelation. His father's partner Mr. Telford sent him Rogers' "Italy." Perhaps the giver thought only of the poetry in making his choice, but Ruskin thought less of that than of the wonderful illustrations, those vignettes by a marvellous man Turner, who saw mountains as the boy saw them, but with the eyes of a life's experience. Ruskin's soul went out with a rush to this new master, in whom he found what he had been seeking ever since his precocious mind had begun to grope after the



artistic concept. He set himself to copy the "Alps at Daybreak," and from that moment there was for him no turning back.

Travel again came to the aid of this fortunate prince. That very year he saw the Alps of his dreams—not, however, because of the Turner book, as one might suppose. The son's enthusiasm for the peaks and the great silences found only a qualified echo in the father; but by a happy chance Mr. Ruskin had just bought Prout's "Sketches in Flanders and Germany," and being interested in Gothic, he readily fell in with his wife's suggestion that they should all go to see these places for themselves. In May 1833 they set out, and John Ruskin entered upon a new phase of his mental and moral development.

By way of "customary Calais" the Ruskins began their posting journey through Flanders and Germany. The boy noted in after-years that he was already wise enough to feel Strasburg Cathedral stiff and iron-worky, but the richness of the wooden houses impressed and excited him because of their promise of nearness to Switzerland. "The Nature of Gothic" was not yet even dimly perceived, otherwise the houses would have suggested more than Switzerland. That land of his desire was approached strategically after family council with Salvador, their courier. Should it be Basle or Schaffhausen? At Basle there were no Alps in sight. To Schaffhausen, then, be it; and so, on a memorable Sunday evening, "suddenly—behold—beyond!"

A lifetime later he paused, with remembered

emotion, on these exclamatory words, and left his great paragraph incomplete. Artist that he was, he could not write the name of the sacred rampart of Europe, but there was no need to tell his readers what he had seen. He resumes :—

“There was no thought in any of us for a moment of their being clouds. They were clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky, and already tinged with rose by the sinking sun. Infinitely beyond all that we had ever thought or dreamed,—the seen walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us ; not more awful, round heaven, the walls of sacred Death.”

For the rest of that journey he moved in an enchanted land, with Turner for his guide. They crossed the Splügen and went down into Italy, seeing Milan, the Lakes, and the Mediterranean at Genoa. Then they came back through the Oberland to Chamouni, the scene in after-days of many labours. Already he had a new great work on hand—he would make an Italy of his own after the manner of Mr. Rogers, and be his own illustrator, after the manner of Turner. He set himself to imitate the delicate vignettes, and as he wrought came to a surer dexterity of hand, to be further confirmed in the next year's tour. The route of that second journey is recorded in his sketches: Chamouni, St. Bernard, Aosta, the Oberland once more, St. Gothard, Lucerne, by the Stelvio to Venice and Verona, and home through the Tyrol and Germany. But his study of the Alps was not alone



Raskin's House  
Denmark Hill.





artistic. The young man of science was also busy with a geological inquiry, helped by Saussure's *Voyages dans les Alpes*, a birthday gift from his father in 1834. The mountains, he had seen, held physical secrets as well as possibilities of picture-making, and these he set himself to discover.

In the interval between the first and second Alpine journeys, John Ruskin was sent to school as a day-boy with the Rev. Thomas Dale in Grove Lane, Peckham. The mere place of his new Academe had not then the odd associations it bears for us to-day, although it is at least quaint that he should have passed, with a brief interlude of study at King's College, London, straight from Peckham to Christ Church. It was now recognised that Dr. Andrews would never prepare him for college and the Church, in which the elder Ruskins hoped in due time to see their genius advancing towards lawn sleeves. But while he made some better progress in mere school-work with Mr. Dale, Ruskin had other occupations that were leading him surely away from Holy Orders.

The year 1834 had seen his first appearance in print with his "Enquiries on the Causes of the Colour of the Water of the Rhine," and another essay, "Facts and Considerations of the Strata of Mont Blanc," both published in Loudon's *Magazine of Natural History*. Nor was Poetry neglected. Through his cousin Charles, a clerk in Messrs. Smith, Elder's, he had been introduced to Mr. Pringle, the Editor of that sumptuous boudoir annual *Friendship's Offering*. Mr. Pringle encour-

aged Ruskin's verse-making, and even took the boy to see Samuel Rogers. At that interview Ruskin knew not how to play the courtier; his talk to the poet of "Italy" was all of Mr. Turner's drawings, about which Rogers showed little enthusiasm, and no progress was made in that direction. Mr. Pringle even administered a mild rebuke on the way back to Herne Hill. But *Friendship's Offering* for 1835 contained three poems—"Andernach," "St. Goar," and "Salzburg"—all by John Ruskin, and they were illustrated with a beautiful plate engraved by Goodall after Purser, somewhat in the Turner manner. So the bard felt he might hold a candle to Mr. Rogers after all. This was all very giddy and exciting, no doubt, but greater joy was in store, dashed, however, by a miscarriage of publication. No matter, he had entered the lists and broken his first lance for his hero. *Blackwood's* criticism of Turner's Academy pictures for 1836 roused the young man to reply. Mr. Ruskin enclosed the MS. to the artist, asking permission to send it to "Maga"; but Turner, while obliged, was contemptuous of attacks, desired no reply, and sent the MS. to Mr. Munro of Novar, who had bought the censured picture. This article, the germ of "Modern Painters," was therefore lost. Discovered long afterwards in a duplicate copy, it shows Turner's champion firm in his saddle—firmer, indeed, than he ever was on the back of that early pony from which he rolled so persistently into the mud of Norwood lanes.

With these occupations and excitements, tempered

by painting lessons from Copley Fielding and by the wholesome fear of the Oxford matriculation examination, now looming in sight, Ruskin passed the year 1836. In October he matriculated, and the following January saw him go into residence. Like everything else in his career, his entry into Oxford was unique, a thing apart and purely Ruskinesque, unparalleled perhaps in the history of the University. At that amiable comedy we are now to assist.

## CHAPTER III

### OXFORD

EVER desirous to do the best for his son, Mr. J. J. Ruskin realised the serious importance of entering him at a college that offered the highest social and educational advantages. His choice fell upon Christ Church, where the society was certainly unexceptionable in point of rank, and where scholarship was represented by its Dean, the mighty Grecian Gaisford, unpolished in manner but withal terribly learned.

To Gaisford Mr. Ruskin went in the early part of the year 1836, to arrange for John's matriculation. The son, writing of the interview long afterwards, is quietly alive to its humour. Blunt Dean and earnest paterfamilias must have made an odd contrast as they discussed what status John should occupy in college. Mr. Ruskin learned that there was a finer flower of undergraduate known as the Gentleman-Commoner. Was there anything to hinder his son's being enrolled as such? It was merely a question of some rather heavy fees. Money mattered not, and thus it came about long afterwards that Mr. Tuckwell, writing delightfully of that far-off Oxford of 1837, mentions among the men of note "Young Gentleman-Commoner Ruskin."





Chamouni  
and Mt. Blanc.

W. B. J.





It was an Oxford somewhat hard for us of a later generation to realise. Tract XC. was still three years ahead, and the University was only beginning to arouse herself from her long lethargy. But stirrings of a new spirit were in the air, and at Oriel Newman was fighting his great spiritual battle that would at length separate him from his Alma Mater and from the Church of his fathers, but would set a quickening seal upon the place he had left. It was an age of remarkable men—Stanley, Matthew Arnold, Clough, Lord Hobhouse, Henry Acland, Jowett. Gladstone had but recently gone down. Of the greater dons of that time, Dr. Routh, who had actually seen Dr. Johnson, still held the Presidency of Magdalen and kept the eighteenth century alive in dress and manner, but he appeared rarely in the streets after 1836. Pusey, more or less a hermit, occupied the Hebrew Chair, and formed the subject of fantastic myths. Buckland, the geologist, with his surprising hat and bag, was, next to the Dean, the chief “character” of Christ Church, then rich in oddities. Newman, taking indispensable exercise, was a familiar figure on the country roads any afternoon.

Undergraduate life had less diversity, less colour, than it carries with it to-day. Athletic sports were unknown, football unheard of; there was only one cricket field, the Magdalen ground. Boating had not become a passion; the delicate, lazy delights of punt or canoe on the Cher had not yet been discovered. The hunt, the drag, hurdle-jumping, and tandem-driving

amused the rich. Men drank too much, and on Sunday, according to Mozley, in a college affection forbids us to name, they drowned, in a double measure of ale, the boredom of writing out, in compulsory abstract, the morning's sermon at St. Mary's. Costume was stiff and formal: academic dress strictly enforced. Frock and tail coats were correct in hall; the beaver-hat was worn on the way to the boats or the cricket field. No one would have appeared in flannels on the High. The times were now dull, now riotous—as ever, since St. Scholastica's day. Rowdiness moves in cycles, passing from college to college as the wind blows. At the time when John Ruskin went up, Christ Church seems to have been lively. At first he was an augmenting cause.

If anything was needed to make his position more difficult—and difficult it was enough, owing to his early education—it was the extension of his mother's care even to the gates of Christ Church. It would not be fair to blame her, for Ruskin was physically delicate, and needed watching over in an especial degree. But it might have been well to have spared him the burden of a chaperone. It is easy to imagine the unholy glee of his contemporaries when it became known that the Gentleman-Commoner from a Peckham Academy had actually been accompanied to college by his "Mamma," as he called her. Mrs. Ruskin took lodgings in High Street, and her son devoted all his evenings to her, until Tom, the great bell of Christ Church, recalled him at nine o'clock

to his rooms in Peckwater Quadrangle. At first he had to put up with the usual furious invasions of the revel-rout of undergraduates, but he lived that down, helped no doubt by the diplomacy that led him to lay in a bottle or two of papa's best wine. But the ungodly broke his windows, rode on his back round the quadrangle, and made his reading of an essay in Hall the occasion for what would now be called a "rag," culminating in the inevitable bonfire. His theme, alas! had been very long and very fine. He had transgressed the unwritten law that no Gentleman-Commoner's composition should exceed forty-eight words in length. He had behaved like a vulgar reading-man, and he was taken to task accordingly. But in repartee he could hold his own neatly enough.

There used to be an undergraduate tradition, for which there is no hint of authority in *Præterita*, that Mrs. Ruskin did not intend her son to go into college at all, but to live with her in High Street. Christ Church militant, the tradition says, broke the windows every night until Ruskin came into the House. But this is disposed of by the testimony of the autobiography. Ruskin tells us that his first night in residence was spent in Peckwater. The madcap ways of the noble young men with whom her son was thrown were inexplicable, if flattering, to Mrs. Ruskin. "It does little good sporting *his* oak," she writes, adding that Lord Desart and Grimston had climbed in through the window, when John was "hard at work." The

dear lady evidently imagined that it was eagerness for her son's society that prompted this feat.

Brought up as he had been, Ruskin was at once a little too superior and not superior enough. His intolerance of undergraduate pranks is evident from one of his poems, in which he describes contemptuously the noise of a distant "wine." But he found staunch and good friends in Acland and Liddell. The fame of his drawings soon brought the curious to his rooms, and Gaisford sent for his portfolio, which he returned with a note of compliment.

Wretchedly prepared, Ruskin of course found his mere reading a tax, and he had to work out of all proportion to the average necessities of the case. In these days of far severer schools, the Honours man is tempted to smile at the elementary studies which cost the future Professor of Fine Art so much toil. Luckily, in Osborne Gordon he found a sympathetic tutor, who in the fulness of time pulled him through. A very pleasant part of his Christ Church days was his friendship with Buckland, who pressed his artistic talent into the service of the geology lecture. Some of Ruskin's drawings are still in use at the House. At the Bucklands' he met Darwin, and recognised him at once for a man of genius.

To win the Newdigate Prize for English Verse Ruskin set himself with infinite labour and patience. Three times he tried. The first time Stanley beat him, the second time Dart; the third time was lucky, and in 1839, coached by Keble, he recited his "Salsette





The Quadrangle and Pelican  
Corpus Christi College  
Oxford

H. J. P. 1854





and Elephanta" in the Sheldonian Theatre at Commemoration.

At this point, however, his career was interrupted by serious illness, due to a disappointment. Shortly before he went up to Oxford, he had fallen wildly in love with one of the beautiful daughters of his father's partner, Mr. Domecq. But Adèle Clotilde saw nothing in the awkward poetical boy of Herne Hill, and the union eagerly desired by the parents of the young people could not be arranged. The lady made another match. During his first two years at Christ Church, Ruskin ate his heart out and sang his sentimental woes. Then he was threatened with consumption, and was carried from health resort to health resort for two years. The news of Adèle's marriage was carefully concealed from him. For the time his degree stood over, and sympathetic relatives spoke of a blighted career, of honours lost, and with them all hope of high preferment in the Church. Every one who can estimate the circumstances aright understands that, despite the Newdigate, John Ruskin was not on the high-road to academic distinction, as the Schools account such.

Fortunately for the world, he recovered, and in 1842 he went up again to Oxford. Taking pass Schools, he was awarded a ludicrous distinction then in vogue—complimentary honours, "an Honorary Double Fourth." It is in no carping spirit that we are at this pains to place Ruskin's scholarship at its proper level; it only makes his independent achievement the more extraordinary when we realise how meagrely

equipped he came to his task. Here is no wail that he was not turned out a finished pedant, but one does regret, on a consideration of pure economy, that he lacked the training sufficient to save him from the ever-lurking, insidious blunder, source of much sorrow, and painful waste of time in after-years.

It is difficult to arrive at a sure knowledge of his feelings towards his Alma Mater. His reticences hint at a life not wholly at ease there. The Cathedral stirs him, but there is no passionate affection for the stones of Oxford. In all his references to the University there is not one passage touched with the spirit of the Scholar Gypsy. His was not the temper that would turn to watch with wistful adoration—

“The line of festal light in Christ Church Hall.”

In its vast spaces he confessed himself always out of place.

Fiercely ironical (in *Fors Clavigera*), he reproaches Harrison for wasting time in Magdalen walks, “old-fashioned thirty years ago.” Why did he not seek “the rapturous sanctities of Keble,” the lively new zigzag parapet of Tom Quad, or “the elongating suburb of the married Fellows on the cock-horse road to Banbury”? Perhaps one may detect some enthusiasm for the groves of Magdalen in his irony, some jealousy for Christ Church in the protest against the parapet of Tom Quad, but it is doubtful whether Wolsey’s foundation moved him as it has moved many. The gaunt outlines of Peckwater, where he lodged, looking

across to the still drearier pile of the library, impressed him at first. Later he takes this as a sign of crudity. But he cannot at any time have loved it. And he certainly hated the "howling" of riotous undergraduates.

In Arnold and Newman the spires of Oxford and the snapdragon on her walls awoke a romantic longing that is scarcely discoverable in Ruskin. But however deep might be her offence, he was loyal to the trust Oxford had given him and loyal to the idea of a University. "It is," he said long afterwards to his pupils, "the scholar's duty to know and love the perpetual laws of classic literature and art." That was the reason of their presence at the University, and he warned his hearers that he had nothing to give them that they could sell. "If you come to get your living out of her, you are ruining both Oxford and yourselves."

From reticences and implications rather than from overt statements, some hint may be caught of Ruskin's attitude towards his University. Of his return thither, and of his work as Professor, something will be said on a later page. We have now brought him to the year 1842, in which he took his B.A. degree and was entitled to sign himself "A Graduate of Oxford." That modest title he put to a memorable use. It was the signature of the first volume of "Modern Painters," the work in which he found his vocation. The claims of Poetry and the Church had faded away before the new vision of Ruskin the Art Critic.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BEGINNINGS OF FAME

FOR Ruskin, the long break in his Oxford life had been anything but unfruitful. He had extended his travels; he had passed by way of the Loire and the Riviera to Rome; he had visited Naples, Bologna, Venice, and Basle. Although often very ill, he was never really idle, and his brain was constantly accumulating impressions, that, altered and exalted by his analytic thought, were to provide the rich material of his work. His pencil was always employed and dexterity increased; the mere mannerism of the drawing master fell away, and Ruskin developed a style of his own. The centre of his mental processes was Turner, always Turner.

On his twenty-first birthday his father had given him the Master's "Richmond Bridge" and "Gosport." Out of his redundant pocket-money he had himself purchased "Harlech Castle," an extravagance startling to his indulgent parent, who was scarcely prepared for this flight of hero-worship. But the incident brought an introduction to the artist, and a curious friendship sprang up between the elder and the younger genius. Now more than ever Ruskin observed Nature in terms of Turner. On the way to Naples, he saw at La





F. B. Johnson

Ruskin Walk  
Denmark Hill





Riccia that wonderful effect of winter landscape which he reproduced in a passage that is a veritable Turner in words. Many, on meeting it for the first time in "Modern Painters," must have exclaimed when they had read half-way, "But this is a Turner"; and it is with a curious thrill that one reads the opening sentence of the next paragraph—"Tell me who is likest this, Poussin or Turner?" The cunning with which he builds up this startling climax remains one of the chief proofs, perhaps the chief proof, of Ruskin's power over language. This may be claimed without disputing the criticism that denies classic rank to the passage in question. He got his effect, but forced the means beyond due classical restraint. It is the exuberant effort, one had almost said the trick, of an exceptionally clever boy, revelling in newly discovered powers.

Before his illness, he had published some scientific papers in Loudon's *Magazine*, and these led the Editor to tell Mr. Ruskin that his son was certainly the greatest natural genius he had ever known, and that one day, "when both you and I are under the turf, it will be remembered in the literary history of your son's life that the first article of his which was published was in Loudon's *Magazine of Natural History*." The period following his restoration to health was marked also by memorable advance in his conception of art. It was in the days just preceding his final examination, when he was reading at Herne Hill with Osborne Gordon, that this formative experience came to him.

During a walk on Tulse Hill he began to draw a tree trunk entwined with ivy. Schooled as he had been to arbitrary "composition," he suddenly revolted from the extremity of that law, in the recognition that the natural disposition of the ivy was infinitely finer than any conventional rearrangement of his own could be. From that moment he vowed fidelity above all things to Nature herself. To that hour he looked back as narrowly devout men do to the instant of their conversion.

One of the pleasantest periods of Ruskin's life is to be found in the record of those busy days at Herne Hill, when the first volume of "Modern Painters" was in progress.

After his industrious morning, he would go for a tramp in the Norwood lanes, and look in perhaps at the Dulwich gallery; or he might give Mr. George Richmond a sitting for the full-length portrait then in progress, or call on Mr. Windus, whose roomful of Turner drawings were invaluable to a young man fighting Turner's battle. In the evening he wrote again for an hour or two, but there was no burning of midnight oil. Next morning at breakfast the previous day's task was read over to Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin, who received their privilege with emotion, not untouched with tears. We know that breakfast table from "A Conversation," one of the birthday poems. It is dramatic in form and serio-comic. Mrs. Ruskin feels the touch of winter and complains of draughts. Mr.

Ruskin sighs for the skies of Italy, whereat Master Ruskin interjects soulfully :

“Skies so blue, over you.”

He permits himself to speak only six times in the dialogue. The sayings are characteristic of the meteorologist and of the colourist. Mr. Ruskin longs for the beauties of Italian architecture, and the son echoes :

“Gems and marbles, rich and rare.”

But that scene was several years earlier. One may be sure that in 1842, when the newly written sheets of “Modern Painters” were the breakfast-table topic, Mrs. Ruskin had no care for winter and rough weather.

The rough weather lay ahead—for the young author. John Ruskin was ready to step down into the lists of the world for the combat of half a century. His challenge to preconceived ideas rang clear from the pages of that first volume, published (without previous hawking about, as foolish rumour says) by Messrs. Smith, Elder in May 1843. The new doctrines raised a storm. Ruskin, already somewhat eminent, found himself in the front rank of fame. The Oxford Graduate’s bold heresies were attacked in the Press with all the slashing freedom of reviewers in those outspoken times. The defendant, Turner, was embarrassed ; he, who “never moved in these matters,” had been forced by young enthusiasm into the central place

of a movement. And so the battle raged, amid scandal and admiration. A sad innovator, but a great writer! Such language was a revelation, although the doctrine might be strange. It was terrible to hear Claude and Poussin arraigned, to see the accepted favourites of the hour set on a subordinate plane to the inexplicable later Turner, who had swerved from things people could understand towards a manner directly in defiance of truth, so that he was "imagined by the majority of the public to paint more falsehood and less fact than any other known master." "We shall see," says Ruskin, "with what reason."

The full exposition of his case, with many digressions, was to occupy him for nearly twenty years. During that period, Ruskin's untiring brain threw off by-products that would have served very well for the life-work of lesser men. His succeeding works, however, were to be written amid new surroundings; for what we may call, for the purposes of this sketch, the first Herne Hill period, was drawing to a close. Increase of material prosperity, their son's fame, a desire to rise to the occasion and to return distinguished hospitality in a distinguished way, led the elder Ruskins to seek a more commodious home. "Subtlest of temptations," the son called it, when he told how it cost his father much of his former happiness.

The year that saw the publication of "Modern Painters" was that of the Ruskins' removal to 51 Denmark Hill. There, with frequent intervals of travel





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Kinnoull



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abroad, and with one brief interlude, to be hereafter mentioned in a single word, John Ruskin lived and worked until, having laid both his parents to rest, he turned northward and sought those "Gates of the Hills, whence one returns not."

## CHAPTER V

### "THE INDUSTRY OF MID-LIFE"

WITH the new home on Denmark Hill as a base of operations, John Ruskin sent his "line out through all the earth." He went far afield for his material, but for the most part his actual writing was done in the new study, of which, as well as of the house, he has left a minute record, in that chapter of *Præterita* entitled "The State of Denmark."

It was to his parents "a peaceful yet cheerful and, pleasantly, in its suburban manner, dignified, abode of their declining years." For his own part he confesses that the place had little to endear it, although it had every good in it except nearness to a stream. The old passion for running water, discovered on the banks of Tay and by the Springs of Wandel, was still alive and clamant—never to be stilled, in fact, while life endured—and Ruskin looked back with regret to that early unaccomplished plan of digging a model canal with real locks, which had been one of his dreams at Herne Hill.

The new house stood in seven acres of ground, meadow, orchard, and kitchen-garden; there was a lawn on which the breakfast-room opened, that room which, he notes, was extremely pretty when its walls were

mostly covered with lakes by Turner and doves by Hunt. The dining- and drawing-rooms were “spacious enough for our grandest receptions—never more than twelve at dinner.” Guests usual on a birthday were Turner, Prout, Stanfield, Leslie, Mulready, and Roberts; a company where respect went hand in hand with understanding, while the talk ranged from art (except when Turner was there) to the last subtleties of—sherry.

As for the great man’s own room, fifteen feet by five-and-twenty inside the bookcases, it was distinct, as his, only by its large oblong table around which the rest of the available space made a passage. The lighting was awkward, from two windows forming a bow, blank in the middle, giving a cross-light that considerably fretted the student. Above was his bedroom, with command of the morning clouds, until the encroaching builder stole that inestimable aid to healthy thought. “In such stateliness of civic domicile the industry of mid-life now began.”

Of that giant industry it is hopeless to give any adequate account in this brief study. The most that can be done is to indicate, at the risk of tedium, the chronology of Ruskin’s writings, and the contributory journeyings. With the ground cleared, once for all, by that synoptic survey, we follow Ruskin at leisure, and with some liberty of selection and omission, to the chief scenes of his inspiration in France, Switzerland, and Italy. And unto these last we shall come not in the spirit of the guide-book, but seeking by salient illustration to catch at least



a glimpse of the things Ruskin himself saw, and to learn if possible in what temper he approached them.

As a central point, it is well to remember that "Modern Painters" went steadily forward from 1842 until 1860, the dates of the first and fifth volumes. The second appeared in 1846. Preparatory to its production he had travelled in Switzerland, and had studied old masters in the Louvre, in 1844. In 1845 he made his first tour alone, visiting, with memorable results, Pisa; Lucca and Florence, where he took up the study of Christian Art; Verona, which gave colour to all his thought and teaching; and Venice, where he awoke to the meaning of Tintoret. The year 1846 found him passing through France and the Jura, to Geneva, then over Mont Cenis into Italy. Next year he was in Scotland. In 1848 he began a pilgrimage to the English cathedrals, and visited Amiens, Paris, and Normandy, and the same year he threw off that wonderful parergon, "The Seven Lamps of Architecture."

That work was not written at Denmark Hill, but at 31 Park Street, his London residence during his short and unfortunate married life. To Switzerland he went again the next year, and spent the winter in Venice studying missals and architecture. In 1850 he wrote the first volume of "The Stones of Venice" at Park Street. 1851 is memorable for the pamphlet "Notes on Sheepfolds," purchased by at least one simple shepherd in the belief that it was a practical guide to his calling. Too late, the good man discovered that



Christ Church Oxford



he had paid his florin for a tract on ecclesiastical polity. The same year Ruskin made the acquaintance of Carlyle and Frederick Denison Maurice, defended the Pre-Raphaelites, travelled again in France and Switzerland, and spent the winter and the following spring in Venice. On December 19 Turner died, and Ruskin heard that he had been named an executor—a trust resigned as to the letter of the law, but discharged with how great a fidelity of spirit the Turner drawings in the National Gallery declare; for by Ruskin's infinite labour they were at length rescued from neglect and arranged.

The second and third volumes of “The Stones of Venice” were written in 1852. In 1853 Ruskin appeared first as a lecturer, delivering at Edinburgh his course on “Architecture and Painting.” To Switzerland again in 1854 with his parents, he devoted himself to drawing, and on his return he founded his Working Men's College. In 1855 he fluttered the dovecotes of Art with his first “Academy Notes,” so destructive to the mere market value of some men's work that *Punch* introduced a sad Academician singing:—

“I paints and paints,  
Hears no complaints,  
And sells before I'm dry;  
Till savage Ruskin  
Sticks his tusk in,  
And nobody will buy.”

That year (1855) saw the second and third volumes

of "Modern Painters." In 1856 he wrote the "Elements of Drawing," and the following year is memorable for two lectures—"Imagination in Architecture," delivered before the Architectural Association; and "Political Economy of Art," at Manchester. He was occupied also with the arrangement of the Turner drawings. "Conventional Art" was spoken at South Kensington, "Work of Iron" at Tunbridge Wells in 1858, and he made his official Report on the Turner Bequest. This busy year also held his "Study of Art," an address to St. Martin's School. Going alone to Switzerland and Italy, he studied Veronese at Turin. On his return he gave the Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art. Three lectures mark 1859—the "Unity of Art," at the Royal Institution; "Modern Manufacture and Design," at Bradford; "Switzerland," at the Working Men's College. This year's tour, the last he made with his parents, was in Germany. "Religious Art" was delivered to the Working Men's College in 1860, and at length the volume of the book of "Modern Painters" was closed.

But there was no resting. At Chamouni he wrote "Unto this Last," and stepped forth a heretic declared. The *Cornhill* published the papers for a time, but at last Thackeray and Smith said nay. Froude gave a second series another chance in *Fraser's Magazine*, but at the fourth essay he too cried, "Hold, enough!" For the first time Ruskin bit the gag. He had turned his back on orthodoxy; he had declared that



the time was out of joint—he had even begun to inquire how it was to be set right. The world, as ever, would have none of such doctrine. The *Fraser* papers were afterwards published as “Munera Pulveris.”

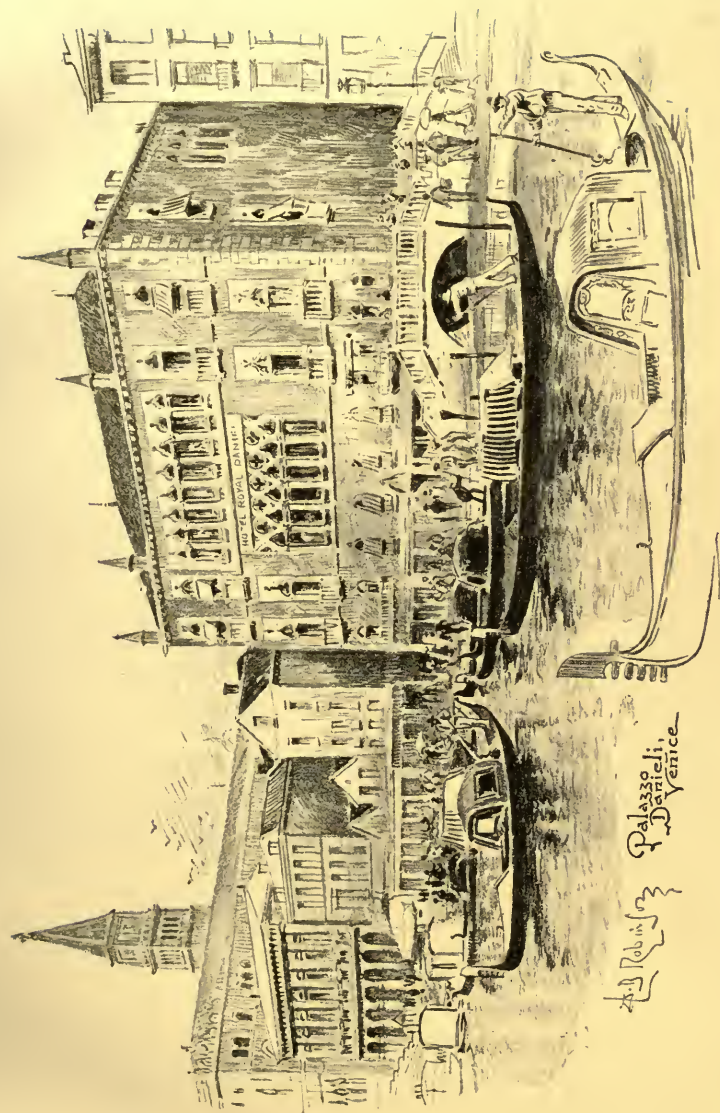
The studies of 1862 and of 1863 were of Luini at Milan and of the Limestone Alps: 1864, the year of his father's death, saw the lectures “Traffic” and “Kings' Treasuries and Queens' Gardens,” next year incorporated in “Sesame and Lilies,” his most popular book. Of immediately following works names and dates must suffice: “Work and Play,” a lecture; “The Study of Architecture” and “War,” the last given at Woolwich (1865); “Time and Tide” (letters to Thomas Dixon, a working cork-cutter); “Modern Art” (1867); “The Mystery of Life” and “The Three-legged Stool of Art” (1868). “Flamboyant Architecture of the Somme,” “The Queen of the Air” (Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm), “Hercules of Camarina,” and “The Future of England” were the fruit of 1869. He revisited France, Switzerland, Verona, and Venice, where the news reached him that he had been elected Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford.

Next year Ruskin took up his professorial duties and delivered his first and second courses. Before the Royal Institution he gave his “Verona and its Rivers,” one of the loveliest examples of his descriptive and expository style. It was the memorable year of the first *Fors Clavigera*. Again he moved through Switzerland and Italy; he made a fruitful study of coins in the British Museum for his Oxford course

on Greek Art, in which he now found a new significance; and the Woolwich Cadets were privileged to hear him once more in the "Story of Arachne." He gave them also, in 1872, "The Bird of Calm." His Slade lectures for the year were "The Eagle's Nest" and "Ariadne Florentina." Corpus now gave him an Honorary Fellowship, which meant an Oxford lodging of his own, "between a Turkey carpet and a Titian," under the very shadow of Christ Church. That Society had already honoured him in 1858 at her first election of Honorary Students.

Here we reach the close of the Denmark Hill period. After his mother's death in 1871, Ruskin looked for and found a long-desired retreat among the Lakes. From W. J. Linton he purchased Brantwood, by Coniston Water, and there in 1872 he made his home until the end. Before we leave the associations of South London, it should be noted, in a retrospective word, that in 1852, when he left Park Street, Ruskin took the house on Herne Hill next door to his old home. There he finished "The Stones of Venice." In 1868 he bought No. 28 itself, and used it for his rougher collection of minerals, keeping only his finest specimens at Denmark Hill. His reasons, given in a letter, are worth recording:—

"first, affection for the old house:—my second, want of room;—my third, the incompatibility of hammering, washing and experimenting on stones, with cleanliness in my stores of drawing. And my fourth is the power



Robinson  
Palazzo  
Danieli,  
Venice



## “THE INDUSTRY OF MID-LIFE” 4

I shall have, when I want to do anything very quietly, of going up the hill and thinking it out in the old garden, where your green-house still stands, and the aviary—without fear of interruption from callers.”

But Dr. Dryasdust has held us too long with these statistical details. It is time, without much burden of chronology, to glance at the chief scenes of Ruskin's inspiration in France, Switzerland, and Italy.



## CHAPTER VI

### FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, AND ITALY

"THERE have been, in sum, three centres of my life's thought: Rouen, Geneva, and Pisa." So Ruskin made avowal when he came late in life to review bygone things. All that he did at Venice he held to be but bye-work, on the strange plea that he dealt there with things hitherto unknown or falsely stated. Because he toiled after truth in Venetian history, because his interest lay in "Tintoret virtually unseen, Veronese unfelt, Carpaccio not so much as named," because, too, something was due to his fondness for gliding about in gondolas, he put Venice in the second place among his instructors. The others had accepted lessons ready to his hand. Venice he regarded, by a strange subtlety of thought, as a receiver rather than a giver. He taught her to read her own history aright, to acknowledge her greatest painters. The receiver, therefore, is less blessed. And the tremendous work itself was pastime, because of those gliding gondolas.

It is a delightful sophistry, but, like all the Ruskin sophistries, sincere. Later came the inevitable qualification. To the three thought-centres he must add Verona, because she gave the colouring to all they taught, and virtually represented the fate and the

beauty of Italy to him. Of this he has left us proof in the passage that records his Pischah-vision of Italian story as he looked, from the heights above Verona, across the Lombard plain.

With so much to be examined in few words, this meagre sketch can take only the lightest account of Rouen. For critical work there the reader must turn to the "Seven Lamps." In the Norman capital Ruskin worked out for himself his grammar of the flamboyant Gothic, approaching his task, as ever, by easy stages, and reading, during that journey of 1835, a preface in the architecture of Abbeville. Not yet ready for Rouen itself, he read the foreword gladly, feeling that "here was entrance into immediately healthy labour and joy." In time he was to appreciate Rouen as a critic, and the preface became an interpretation. On that first visit the cathedral gave him, in a purely personal sense, a thrill of delightful contrast, just such a contrast as the Ruskin way of life must have produced time and again:—

"Imagine the change between one Sunday and the next,—from the morning service in this building (Dr. Andrews' chapel) attended by the families of the small shop-keepers in the Walworth Road, in their Sunday trimmings (our plumber's wife sat in the next pew . . . ); fancy the change from this, to high mass in Rouen Cathedral, its nave filled by the white-capped peasantry of half Normandy!"

A fuller account of Rouen and its cathedral was

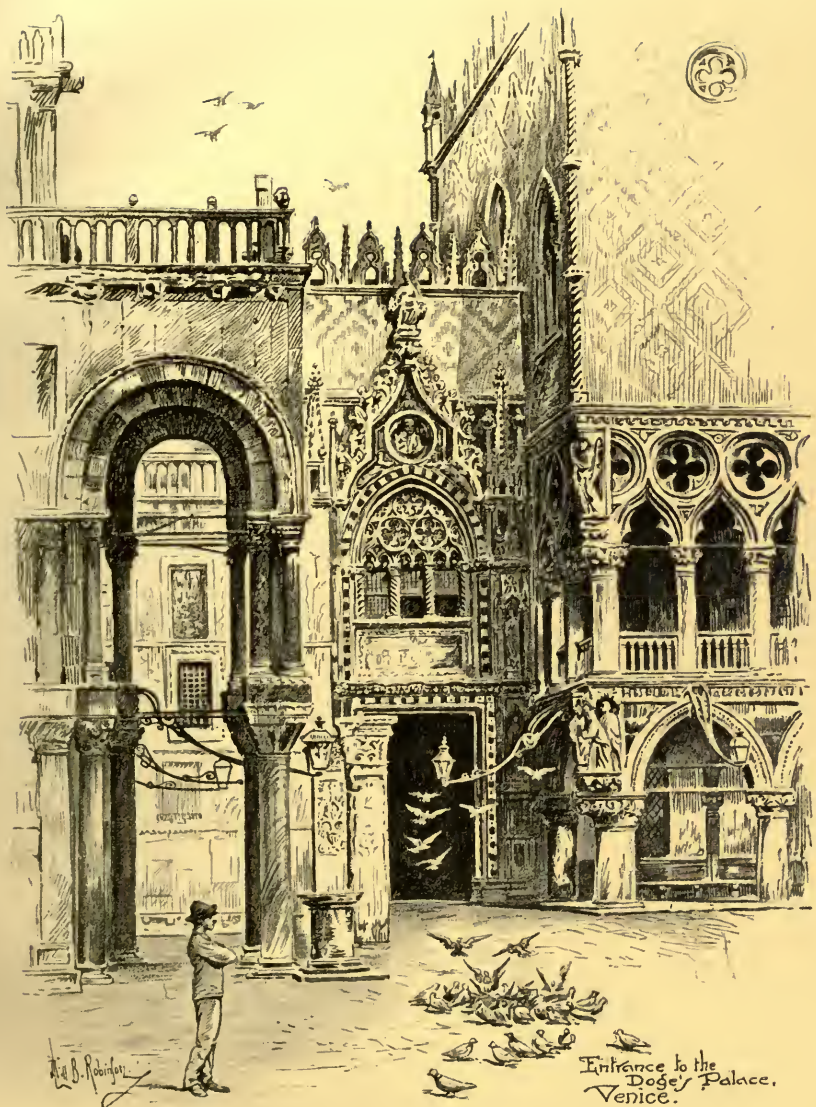
among the unfulfilled projects of Ruskin's later life. Of Abbeville, and his "cheerful, unalloyed, unwearying pleasure" in getting sight of the city and St. Wulfran on a fine summer afternoon, he has left a record, in one phrase of which, if it reflect an actual thought of that 5th of June 1835, and not the afterthought of years, we may trace the germ of doctrine expounded—with what mastery and knowledge!—in the first volume of "The Stones of Venice"—the unity of church Gothic and domestic Gothic. Examine in particular the use of the word "faithful," and learn that Ruskin used no epithet at random. He has spoken of the churches of Abbeville, and continues:—

"Outside, the faithful old town gathered itself and nestled under their buttresses, like a brood beneath the mother's wings."

In those days the kinship of house and church had not been disguised or swept out of remembrance by modern desecrators. St. Wulfran's and St. Riquier's walls and towers were alike coeval with the gabled timber houses of which the busier streets chiefly consisted when Ruskin first saw Abbeville.

One could linger long enough over the story of those posting journeys to the South, with their digressions to Dijon, where, in after-years, at the Hotel de la Cloche, the master pointed out the room where, in his wash-hand basin, had been bitten "with savage carelessness" the last plate for the "Seven Lamps." But the limits of these pages forbid.





Entrance to the  
Doge's Palace,  
Venice.





There was a time when Ruskin wrote of Venice: "Thank God I am here; it is the Paradise of cities. This, and Chamouni, are my two bournes of Earth." Once more the correcting hand descended on these words. When he wrote that rhapsody, he *knew* neither Rouen nor Pisa, though he had seen both. Geneva, he notes, is meant to include Chamouni in the triad of "tutresses"—a word, by the way, not of the first choice, and unworthy of his style.

"My true mother town of Geneva," Ruskin exclaims, when he tells how it was there, in church, to the accompaniment of braying organ and doggerel hymns, that the impulse came to him which threw his new thought into the form of "Modern Painters." He repaid his debt in a wonderful passage of description, enshrining the memory of the little town, the canton four miles square, in the days of his early visits, before the place was spoiled by "the people who have hold of it now, with their polypous knots of houses, communal with 'London, Paris, and New York.'" He stayed on his first visits (1833, 1835) at the Hôtel des Étrangers, "one of those country houses open to the polite stranger, some half-mile out of the gates." There he rejoiced in a Geneva "composed of a cluster of water-mills, a street of penthouses, two wooden bridges, two dozen of stone houses on a little hill, and three or four perpendicular lanes up and down the hill." He saw it as a community well-ordered, the home of honest industries, this bird's nest of a place, centre of religious and social thought to all Europe,

“Saussure’s school and Calvin’s, — Rousseau’s and Byron’s,—Turner’s—”

Here Ruskin the humorist looks out. He was ready, he confessed, to add that Geneva was his own school as well, “but I didn’t write all that last page to end so.”

The outsider who sees most of the game will perhaps hazard the opinion that kindred Chamouni was even more closely interwoven with Ruskin’s life and work. It was the inspiration of early poems (a small matter, but worth noting); it was the base of his constant studies in the geological structure of the Alps, scene of close observation of plants and clouds, subject of many drawings. There he grappled with the ethical problems predestined in “The Nature of Gothic,” and at Mornex he gave them their first formal expression in “Unto this Last,” fruit of a deep antagonism to his times; thither in 1879 he longed to return, but glacial changes had made Chamouni a “desolated home to him”—for vanishing glaciers had betrayed him. But it was at Chamouni, after all, in 1882, that he wrote his delightful, urbane foreshadowing of *Præterita*, the Epilogue to the reprint of “Modern Painters.” He had a dream to establish his life on some parcel of land near the chain of Mont Blanc, and once he actually bought a piece of meadow in Chamouni, but only to sell it again, on foreseeing the approach of the inevitable tourist, and consequent ruin of those solitudes.

From the Diary of 1844, a fragment on Chamouni

seemed to Ruskin perhaps worth keeping. His sparing hand is justified :—

*“28th June, half-past ten.—I never was dazzled by moonlight until now ; but as it rose behind the Mont Blanc du Tacul the full moon almost blinded me : it burst forth into the sky like a vast star. For an hour before, the aiguilles had appeared as dark masses against a sky looking as transparent as clear sea, edged at their summits with fleeces of cloud breaking into a glorious spray and foam of white fire. A meteor fell over the Dôme as the moon rose : now it is so intensely bright that I cannot see the Mont Blanc underneath it ; the form is lost in its light.”*

Excellent as it is in feeling, this first-hand writing from a journal shows how necessary it was for Ruskin that his greater works should have been revised by Mr. W: H. Harrison, his mentor and editor for thirty years. In his charming tribute to that friend, Ruskin is plainly all at sea about the technical reasons for his taskmaster's severity : but he took his castigation like a man, rewriting and recasting cheerfully.

In Ruskin's account of Pisa occurs an implicit explanation of his curious depreciation of Venice as a teacher. When he came to any place prepared for what he was to seek as material for learning and found it, there he recognised an informing influence. At his first sight of Pisa, in 1840, he was impressed by the purity of her architecture, but he had too little knowledge to make progress. His guides were chiefly

Byron and Shelley. But in 1845 he had read enough of Dante and of Sismondi's "Italian Republics" to know what he had to seek. His picture of his works and days there is altogether amiable. Still orthodox, he found in the frescoes of the Campo Santo the entire doctrine of Christianity. He copied the frescoes, then rapidly vanishing to make way for civic monuments; he sketched in the streets and drew admiring crowds of companionable—not common—Italians, in whom he recognised their wonderful natural gift for knowing what was right in a picture.

At Pisa Ruskin made good friends with the Abbé Rossini, Professor of Fine Art, and heaped coals of fire on his head by going patiently to hear his great lecture on "The Beautiful," although that morning the Abbé had dismissed Turner with a superficial word, "Yes, yes, an imitator of Salvator." Ruskin's only revenge was a conviction, after the lecture, that he knew a good deal more about the Beautiful than the professor. That excellent man in turn made ample amends by having a scaffolding put up to enable a future Professor of Fine Art in another place to make partial records of the frescoes. And thus—

"The days that began in the cloister of the Campo Santo usually ended by my getting up on the roof of Santa Maria della Spina, and sitting in the sunlight that transfused the warm marbles of its pinnacles till the unabated brightness went down beyond the arches of the Pont-a-Mare,—the few footsteps and voices of the twilight fell silent in the streets, and the city and her





THE MOAT OF NUREMBERG. DRAWING BY JOHN RUSKIN





mountains stood mute as a dream, beyond the soft eddying of Arno."

Needless, perhaps, to point out that even here, in words written a good forty years later, despite Dante and Sismondi, the influence of Shelley is still paramount.

These, then, were Ruskin's three great teachers, and such, in the lightest outline, were the impressions he drew from them while his mind was still plastic; although it is well to remember that his account is written, for the most part, with the hand and thought of ripe experience.

Of Lucca, where Quercia's *Ilaria del Caretto* became for Ruskin his ideal of Christian sculpture, the mere mention must suffice. Florence, at first grievously misunderstood, at length took her true place; in witness whereof—"Val d'Arno" (most charming of the Slade lectures), the "Laws of Fésolé," and passages innumerable throughout the works.

The central point of Florence was, for Ruskin, Giotto's Campanile, lovingly remembered in the frontispiece to "The Seven Lamps." "Mornings in Florence" records his vision, one of the most significant things in all his teaching, that tells how the last traditions of Faith and Hope of the Jewish and Gentile races met for their beautiful labour at the foot of that Tower. He begs the pilgrim to get right the little piece of geography fixing the local relation of the Campanile, the Baptistery, and Brunelleschi's Dome.

For the Baptistry was the last building raised on Earth by the descendants of the workmen taught by Dædalus, the Tower the loveliest inspiration of the men who lifted up the tabernacle in the wilderness. Here is the last and noblest inspiration of living Greek and living Christian work. And the Dome was the latest example of the best Christian architecture just before the onset of decline. Long afterwards Ruskin mourned the profanation of that sacred spot by all the horrors of a modernised Italy.<sup>1</sup>

And what of Venice? "Bye-work," he said. Possibly, but not to be neglected. It was a "vain temptation," he says; but it is well that Ruskin allowed himself to be tempted. He was still a boy when he first saw Venice, and the beginning of everything was the sight of the gondola beak coming actually inside the door of Danieli's hotel. Exquisite sensation for Master John Ruskin! Of the approach to the city he has left us his impressions in one of those long, deliberate passages—minute but never tedious—in which he plays the cunning cicerone, who withholds and withholds, until his hearer is ripe for the effect. Sometimes it comes with a gorgeous blaze of colour. Not so at the Vestibule of Venice.

He leads us out on an autumnal morning from the dark eastern gateway of Padua, and so on for hours

<sup>1</sup> "A stand for hackney-coaches, cigars, spitting and harlot-planned fineries." Students of *Fors Clavigera* will recall in that last phrase of censure the fierce old man's plain words on the provenance of high-heeled shoes.

through flat lands, past the tall white tower of Dolo, until we come among the divided waters of the Brenta. Then at Mestre appears the extremity of a canal, black, it seems, with stagnation; but no, it is covered with the black boats of Venice. Enter one, to try if they be real boats or not, and glide across the yielding water, that seems to let the boat sink into soft vacancy, noting as you go (for your guide is the hill-man Ruskin) how all round the horizon lie the Alps of Bassano. Out of the water before you rises at last what seems to be the suburb of an English manufacturing town—"four or five domes, a sullen cloud of smoke issuing from the belfry of a church.

"It is Venice."

Thus quietly, with an intentional hint of anti-climax, he approaches "The Throne," where there is no stint of glories. He shows us the Adriatic, a sea with the bleak power of our own Northern waves, changing her angry pallor to a field of burnished gold about the feet of St. George of the Seaweed; the shadowy Rialto throws its colossal curve slowly forth from behind the Palace of the Camerlenghi, and the Ducal Palace, "flushed with its sanguined veins, looks to the snowy dome of our Lady of Salvation."

But we must beware. This is a Venice that Enrico Dandolo or Francis Foscari would not know. Their Venice lies hidden away in many a grass-grown court and silent pathway and lightless canal. And the Venice to which Ruskin came first had been created for him, as for Turner, by Byron. That Venice is

a mere stage dream, a thing of falsities and anachronisms, against which he was to wage a long war. For when in 1849 Ruskin came, with much material already collected, to write "The Stones of Venice," he discovered that her history would have to be examined anew; for even the accepted authorities could not agree within a hundred years as to the dates of her chief monuments. He must question them, stone by stone. Patiently he set himself to read the riddle of the Ducal Palace and of St. Mark's, and at last he could say that what he had found was truth.

St. Mark's he interpreted as a piece of jewel-work on the grand scale, in the sense of art: in the light of his inevitable ethics, "No city had such a Bible." It is a mighty humanity, perfect and proud, hiding no weakness beneath the mantle, gaining no greatness from the diadem. All that he said of it in the earlier volumes he would have set aside in later days for the more condensed study, "St. Mark's Rest," but those who care most for his writings have not agreed with this judgment. Yet it is well not to neglect "St. Mark's Rest," were it only for the hints of compensation that came to Ruskin amid a ruined and desolated Venice, as she seemed to him then.

There in later days he fell in love with Carpaccio's St. Ursula, worshipping her, someone has finely said, as a sincere Athenian might have worshipped the Queen of the Air. And in this temper, which one may perhaps call Ruskin's meteoric mood, he had new visions of Venetian history, not in her painting





Conistota Water  
and the Old Mill

B. Richardson  
engraver



only but in her buildings. Take, as a single instance, his interpretation of the dream of Magnus of Altinum; that quaint scripture telling how Messer Jesus Christ Our Lord showed that where a red cloud rested there men should build the Church of St. Salvador, and where a white cloud gleamed Our Lady foretold that there should rise St. Mary the Beautiful. It is a subject fitted to the hand of the true air-man Ruskin, he who in "Modern Painters" taught the ways of the Cloud Flocks, and in the "Queen of the Air"—pleaded jealously for unsullied skies. It is well that he did not see the "air-man" of to-day. But to return to our Venetian cloud myth and Ruskin's commentary:—

"None cares to-day whether any God-given cloud is white or red, yet a perception lingers in the old fisherman's eyes of the difference between white nebbia on the morning sea and red clouds in the evening twilight. And the Stella Maris comes in the sea cloud;—Leucothea: but the Son of Man on the jasper throne."

That use of Leucothea—"the white goddess"—is overwhelming. Ruskin the etymologist was not always to be trusted, but here his genius prevailed. Note, too, the student of jewels and rock-crystals rising for a moment skyward to find in the red cloud a throne of jasper.

Such, then, was that notable though lightly esteemed bye-work.

But Venice meant more to Ruskin than even this. He was to make known her painters: in her Scuola di San Rocco he found assurance of his own real vocation. With that crucial incident this less than outline of his Venetian experience must end. One day during the tour of 1845, Ruskin and J. D. Harding entered for the first time the School of St. Roch. There the sight of Tintoret's "Crucifixion" took the strength out of them. Harding felt like a whipped schoolboy; not so Ruskin. He writes in the Epilogue to "Modern Painters," vol. ii. :—

"I felt only that a new world was opened to me, that I had seen that day the Art of Man in its full majesty for the first time; and that there was also a strange and precious gift in myself enabling me to recognise it, and therein ennobling, not crushing me."

It has already been noted that to the number of his teachers Ruskin added, as an afterthought, Verona, representative, to him, of the fate and the beauty of Italy. His memorable up-gathering of all that Verona suggested must be read at length in the lecture he delivered to the Royal Institution in 1870. In its beautiful opening every side of his own interests and character is reflected—the worshipper of mountains, the patient geologist and botanist, the historian, the artist, the poet, and, needless to say, the moralist. Taking his hearers to a height overlooking the city,



he shows them, in a moment of time, all that Italy meant for him. He points out the gateway of the Goths, the valleys of the Inn and of the Adige; he pauses to analyse the structure of the promontory whence he looks down on all the plain between Alp and Apennine—how it hardens from limestone, with knots of splendid brown jasper, into the peach-blossom marble of Verona. In the moat of the city he traces the cradle of modern geological science (for in its trenching Leonardo first suggested the true nature of fossils); in its walls, the cradle of civic life; in its round tower, the first ever embrasured for artillery—constructed against artillery—the cradle of modern war, the beginning of the end of all fortification, “of a system that costs millions a year and leaves England without defence.” There speaks the political philosopher, but in the main his reflections are less prosaic. Twelve miles away is Mantua;<sup>1</sup> beyond its fretted outline, Parma; to the left, at the feet of the Euganean Hills, rests Padua; in the gleam of the horizon beyond—Venice. And at our feet Verona, with the Scaligers’ bridge, the church of San Zeno, the remnants of the Palace of Theodoric—Dietrich of Berne.

This is but a maimed paraphrase of a picture suggested, in slow detail, with wonderful gleams of colour—the Alps of Friuli touched by the sunset “into a crown of strange rubies,” bright flowing Adige, blue

<sup>1</sup> Actually, a good twenty miles.—ED.



Lombard plain. The scene being set, Ruskin gathers all its meaning into this:—

“Now I do not think that there is any other rock in all the world, from which the places, and monuments, of so complex and deep a fragment of the history of its ages can be visible, as from this piece of crag with its blue and prickly weeds. For you have thus beneath you at once the birthplaces of Virgil and Livy, the homes of Dante and Petrarch, and the source of the most sweet and pathetic inspiration of your own Shakespeare; the spot where the civilisation of the Gothic kingdoms was founded on the throne of Theodoric, and where whatever was strongest in the Italian race redeemed itself into life by its leagues against Barbarossa. You have the cradle of natural science and medicine in the schools of Padua; the central light of Italian chivalry in the power of the Scaligers; the chief stain of Italian cruelty in that of Ezzelin; and lastly, the birthplace of the highest art; for among these hills, or by this very Adige bank, were born Mantegna, Titian, Correggio, and Veronese.”

“The only mischief of the place,” he wrote in June 1869—that late visit paid just in time to save a record of the Castelbarco monument before it was “restored”—“the only mischief is its being too rich, a history to every foot of ground and a picture on every foot of wall, frescoes fading away in the neglected streets—like the colours of a dolphin.”

During this visit, one May morning, while Ruskin was sketching under a quiet Italian light in the



Briarwood  
Conyngton

H.B. Robinson



beautiful square of Verona, Longfellow and his little daughter came up and talked with him as he worked. He hoped it was not very vain of him to wish that if a photograph could have been taken of the scene, some people both in England and America would have liked copies of it. But of the meeting of two famous men in the meeting-place of so much history, Ruskin's own words remain the only record, more enduring than any sun-picture.

## CHAPTER VII

### OXFORD ONCE MORE: THE SLADE PROFESSOR

FOR nine years before his appointment to the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Oxford, Ruskin had ceased to write directly on Art. It gave him a text, certainly, but everything now was subordinated to his teaching of moral and political philosophy. In "Unto this Last" he had, in striving to give a logical definition of wealth, spoken words that a materialistic and money-grubbing age could not understand, or refused to understand. The latter is possibly nearer the mark. A system of political economy that scrupled not to call the art of making oneself rich the art of making some one else poor, that postulated upright and clean dealing, the production of only true and honest work, and a just reward for the labourer, who was to have means to command for himself as much labour as he had expended, could not hope to win popular success. We have seen the fate of these papers in the *Cornhill*, and of their successors in *Fraser's*.

What Ruskin sought was to point the way to a complete reform of the social system, and he was received—as every new Gospeller is received. For the best part of a decade he lived much in solitude, at Mornex on the Salève and at Chamouni, wrestling,



often in deep gloom of spirit, with a froward world. He had passed away from all orthodoxy; old friends misunderstood him; to his parents his new views were a sorrow. But his heterodoxy won him the friendship and sympathy of Carlyle, who might have said to Ruskin, "Thy-doxo is my-doxo."

The Oxford appointment did not win him back from heresy; but it brought him, with better heart, once more among the throngs of men. He took up his duties in no perfunctory spirit, and completely rewrote in a maturer form all his teaching on Art, qualified, of necessity, with his now inevitable ethics. His first lecture, delivered on his birthday, February 8, 1870, was an event in the history of the University. The crowd was so great that the Slade Professor's lecture-room could not hold a tenth part, and the audience adjourned to the Sheldonian Theatre, where, amid enthusiasm, Ruskin gave a new direction to work that has had permanent and far-reaching effects upon his countrymen. Of his influence the proof is our wonder nowadays that he should have required, in "Modern Painters" and elsewhere, to do so much clearing of the ground. His introduction, then requiring proof step by step, has for many of us become axiomatic.

Very soon he recognised that merely theoretical teaching could be of little use unless it were reinforced by the practical, and to this end he founded the Oxford School of Drawing, to which came a fair number of the more enthusiastic spirits. The Professor was himself the drawing-master, and he enriched his school

with many gifts—his own sketches, a few examples of Tintoret, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Holman Hunt. Later he endowed the school with a gift of £5000. In spite of antagonisms, there can be no doubt that in his Oxford work Ruskin found pleasure, if not happiness. He became the centre of an interesting circle of young men, who were influenced by his teaching, ethical as well as artistic, and if enthusiasm sometimes led them into Quixotism, well, then, their state was the more gracious.

Quaintest of all the experiments in practising what they preached was the endeavour of Ruskin and his disciples to mend with their own hands a villainous piece of road at Hincksey. The fame of that gallant deed reverberated amid much kindly laughter into after-times. The present writer, one of a far later brood of undergraduates, remembers an afternoon at Hincksey, when he chanced in miry November weather upon a fearful Slough of Despond, that might by courtesy have been called a highway. "That," said a cynical senior man, "is the Ruskin Road." Many picks were broken in the work, and one vigorous but unwary devotee, it is said, drove the other end of the pick through his back, and was, alas! injured for life. But they claimed to have put the road into decent order, at least for the time. It was no part of their scheme to take that or any other bad piece off the Surveyor's hands. Enemies said that the farmers laughed the undertaking to scorn: the truth is, they gave the workmen a vote of thanks and made known certain privileges of



LOIRE-SIDE, DRAWING BY RUSKIN AFTER TURNER





grazing rights which accrued to those who kept up the road. So that even an imperfect feudal system had provided some sort of proper equivalent in kind as the labourer's reward. It was, as it were, an instalment of the Ruskin theory of wages.

Mr. Ruskin's breakfasts at Corpus were famous for their flow of soul, and one wishes that the Oxford of a more recent day had had anything as vital and interesting to offer. Among the young men who came under the Slade Professor's immediate influence, two of the most notable were Mr. W. H. Mallock and the late Arnold Toynbee, the latter of whom gave the Ruskin doctrine practical expression through his social work in the East End of London. With Prince Leopold, Ruskin also formed a warm friendship.

Of his later Oxford life Ruskin has left one very amiable glimpse in *Præterita*. He reveals himself as unconquerably shy amid the distinguished company into which from time to time he was thrust by his fame. For that he blames his want of early training in the mere amenities of society. It is a story within a story, beginning with a dinner at Christ Church, given by the Dean and Mrs. Liddell during the visit of the Princess of Wales. Disraeli and Ruskin were among the guests invited to meet her Royal Highness. "I knew no more how to behave," says the Slade Professor, "than a marmot pup." Very soon Ruskin learned by intuition that a ripple of brighter conversation running round the table concerned himself, and a glance from the Princess confirmed his suspicion.



Some one had told a pleasant story at his expense: how, an evening or two before, the gay Professor, knowing that Mr. and Mrs. Liddell were to dine at Blenheim, entered into a plot with the Liddell girls to steal round from Corpus to the Deanery, where there was to be tea and a little singing or the like. Through blinding snow the Professor kept his tryst, and a delightful evening was just beginning, when, lo! re-enter the Dean and Mrs. Liddell, whose carriage could not get farther than the Parks, owing to the drifts. "How sorry you must be to see us, Mr. Ruskin!" said Mrs. Liddell; to which he replied, "I never was more so." The Dean kindly promised not to interrupt the symposium, but the spell was broken, and Ruskin returned to Corpus disconsolate.

This was matter after Dizzy's own heart, and in ten minutes he had every detail perfect, for future deadly use.

But before the Minister could strike, Ruskin had to run the gauntlet of a talk with the Princess, while "the attendant stars and terrestrial beings round, listened, to hear what the marmot pup had to say for himself."

"In the space of, say, a minute and a half, I had told the Princess that landscape painting had been little cultivated by the Heads of Colleges,—that it had been still less cultivated by the Undergraduates, and that my young lady pupils always expected me to teach them how to paint like Turner in six lessons."

Difficulties assailed Princess and Professor. Her Royal Highness bowed courteously and passed on—to the next Professor. “A blank space,” says Ruskin, “formed itself round me,” when suddenly there entered, in full dress, Miss Rhoda Liddell, “as exquisite a little spray of *rhododendron ferrugineum* as ever sparkled in Alpine dew.”

“Disraeli saw his opening in an instant. Drawing himself to his full height, he advanced to meet Rhoda. The whole room became all eyes and ears. Bowing with kindly reverence, he waved his hand and introduced her—to the world. ‘This is, I understand, the young lady in whose art education Professor Ruskin is so deeply interested!’

“And there was nothing for me but simple extinction, for I had never given Rhoda a lesson in my life. . . . I could only bow as well as a marmot might, in imitation of the Minister, and get at once away to Corpus, out of human ken.”

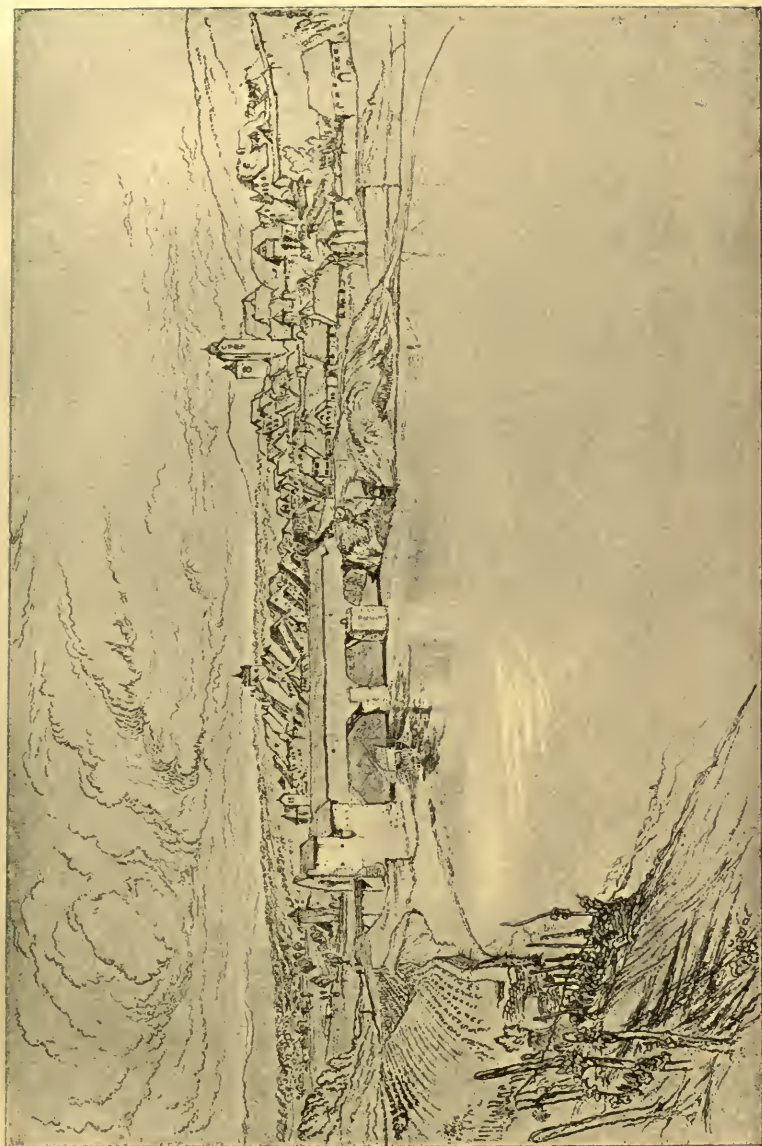
One more glimpse may be given of those Oxford days, or rather evenings. As far as I am aware, it has never been made public, and it may, I trust, be set down without offence, almost exactly as it occurs in one of my old diaries, with only some identifying and too intimate details omitted:—

To-night when I took my usual verses to Mr. ———  
I found him reading by the light of two wax candles—one long, the other short. “Look,” he said, “that is how Ruskin will always have

it. He says it is the perfect light for the student. He told me so one evening when I called on him in Christ Church. I had gone in fulfilment of a promise to show him the silver pen with which Sir Walter wrote the Waverley Novels. When I entered, Ruskin was reading one of the original manuscripts of the Waverley series. He took the pen, and laying it reverently on the page, said, 'Ah, they should *never* be parted.' And during the whole of that visit to Oxford, and indeed for some time afterwards, I had to allow him to keep the pen."

The sequel is perhaps rather more humorous and characteristic than the part of the story here set down, but the time has not yet come to tell the whole of the little comedy. What would have happened, one wonders, had my tutor suggested that the MS. should go with the pen, and not the pen with the MS.!

During this period a note of warmer regard for Oxford may be traced in Ruskin's words, but it is chiefly the Cathedral Church of Christ that has his affection. Personally he was beloved, and his work was valued, and there were many testimonies that he had not toiled fruitlessly. But that could not prevent his resignation of his Chair, when the Museum permitted vivisection. And so for conscience' sake, sadly convinced that he had laboured in vain for an age that took no heed of his teaching, he parted



THE BRIDGE OF RHEINFELDEN. BY RUSKIN AFTER TURNER





company with his University. That was in 1884. The date somewhat anticipates the course of this narrative. During the greater part of his tenure of the Slade Professorship Ruskin's home had been at Brantwood, near Coniston. Thither we must now turn, to note the close of his work and of his life.

But a word may be said here on the permanence or otherwise of his teaching. In political economy he is still a force, but in Art the times seem to have moved far away from Ruskin. To-day we are impressionists, and even post-impressionists, and those who know how to qualify aright the opinions of both the later schools, qualify also Ruskin's dogmatic adherence to literal truth, and recognise that in his intolerance of Whistler he missed the sublimation of literal truth wherein that master's work is great. The sanest criticism of the present day is that which holds a balance between the jarring sects. It owes much to Ruskin as an initial force, but the narrowness of his creed has mulcted him, as Art Critic, in the inevitable penalty of the bigot.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GATES OF THE HILLS

AMID the peace of the Lakes, Ruskin made his home during the last and stormiest period of his life, and there through much suffering he fought his way back to some reassurance of spirit. His conflicts can be traced only in the barest outline here; but first a word must be said in description of the Prophet's retreat at Coniston.

On the margin of Coniston Water, Brantwood stands solitary among its dark firs and larches, remote by a lengthy drive from the village. It is a plain house, still declaring its cottage origin, and with no outward ornament save its turret-room, once the master's own. For the house beautiful, in what Ruskin called the vulgarly æsthetic sense, he took no care. He was not disturbed by a wall-paper or by early Victorian furniture. The old family things served him until the end, to the grief of worshippers who sought Brantwood in the spirit of Bunthorne and Grosvenor. To such he made his position bluntly clear in the preface to the rearranged edition of "Modern Painters" (1883):—

"I am entirely independent for daily happiness upon

the sensual qualities of form and colour; when I want them I take them either from the sky or the fields, not from my walls, which might be either whitewashed or painted like a harlequin's jacket for aught I care; but the slightest incident which interrupts the harmony of feeling and association in a landscape, destroys it all to me, poisoning the entire faculty of contemplation. From my dining-room, I am happy in the view of the lower reach of Coniston Water, not because it is particularly beautiful, but because it is entirely pastoral and pure. Were a single point of chimney of the Barrow ironworks to show itself over the green ridge of the hill, I should never care to look at it more."

To be fastidious about household gods while outside lay a miserable world, seemed to Ruskin mere fiddling while Rome was burning.

Within Brantwood all was solid, old-fashioned comfort, and, while the master's strength endured, a wonderfully busy life. A company of young people helped Ruskin in his manifold works: and the evenings were merry in a fashion that some would have called Philistine. Nigger melodies were not discouraged, and there was no pose of cleverness in the conversation. Down on the lake Brantwood had its own little harbour and fleet of boats. The afternoons were often spent in wood-chopping expeditions.

From the earliest light, and sometimes even before the dawn, Ruskin, who went to bed at half-past ten, was at work in his study. It is a long room, once,

too, hung with Turners and papered with a design taken from Marco Marziale's "Circumcision" in the National Gallery. The furniture was red mahogany, the upholstery bright-green leather. It was not the least beautiful, but in this very place he could write that loveliest and most melodious of his briefer prose passages, beginning: "Morning breaks as I write, along these Coniston Fells—" It is familiar to everybody, and, alas! now grown somewhat too hackneyed to quote in full. Thus, under the shadow of Coniston Old Man, the prophet lived and worked and fought, and at length laid down his armour.

He saw himself in these days "a man clothed in soft raiment—a reed shaken by the wind!" The words bring us to those remarkable volumes containing the final results of his life's thought and teaching, *Fors Clavigera*. The mystical title, explained in a true Ruskin etymology, laborious, minute, and fanciful, signifies "the Fate or Force that bears the Club, or Key, or Nail: that is, in three aspects—as Following, or Fore-ordaining, Deed (or Courage), and Patience, and Laws, known and unknown, of Nature and life;—the Deed of Hercules, the Patience of Ulysses, the Law of Lycurgus." These letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain were begun in 1871, the year before Ruskin settled at Brantwood, and they were continued, as occasion and health served, through seven years. The publication was in parts, issued through the post, at sevenpence, later tenpence, by Mr. George Allen for Mr. Ruskin. He did not advertise his curious magazine,



trusting, as he said, to the public's long nose; and the public, getting wind of the affair, came to buy. "Words winged with Empyrean wisdom, piercing as lightning—and which I do not really remember to have heard the like of," was Carlyle's verdict. "To read *Flors*," says Mr. Collingwood, "is like being out in a thunderstorm." Opinion was certainly tempestuous enough, as the scheme of these reforming papers gradually unfolded itself. Some said the sage was mad, as he brought out of his storehouse things new and old—pastoral, comical, historical, tragical—the ripe experience of fifty years. The world did ill to mock; for never was it so generously taken into confidence by any man of genius. Ruskin withheld nothing that he thought would serve his countrymen. Bitterer than all to him, the working men of Britain sent Ruskin no word of reply, and at last he ceased to address them as "My Friends."

In this place it is impossible to indicate all the bright and sombre threads of that wonderful web, but the central purpose must be outlined. It was the founding of a practical scheme of social regeneration, through the agency of St. George's Company, afterwards called the Guild of St. George. Ruskin, Master of the Guild, invited disciples to devote to the work a tithe of their means. He himself led the way with a tenth of his remaining fortune, once £200,000. This man clothed in soft raiment was exercised in his mind as to the example of St. Francis, and set about shedding his wealth. Land was bought for the agricultural members



of the Guild to cultivate; mills and factories were to be started or acquired for the encouragement of labour that should be, for choice, manual, although machinery was not wholly forbidden. Recreation and instruction were to be provided; a coinage and a costume were contemplated, but never realised. Ruskin framed the Laws, on the fair old model of fourteenth-century Florence; you may read them in the "Laws of Fésolé." It was not Utopian, except in so far as all such dreams must be Utopian in this present world.

It may not be too fanciful to find the sum and substance of all Ruskin's economic teaching in that inscription which it was the "pride of his life" to have discovered on San Giorgio di Rialto. This, "the first word Venice ever speaks aloud," runs: "Around this temple let the merchant's laws be just, his weights true, and his covenants faithful."

Some part of *Fors'* design came into actual being—the Sheffield Museum is to-day its most enduring memorial; but trials and disappointments waited on the work, and brought the Master untold bitterness. In 1877, what he considered the treachery of a friend so dejected him that he all but lost heart. There is of that hard period one curious documentary memorial, which, by the kindness of a friend, is here reproduced for the first time in facsimile, although the letter itself has been printed in "Arrows of the Chace." Every new year, Ruskin used to send a message of good-will to a correspondent, Mr. John Leith of Aberdeen, to be read to his class for Scripture study. For 1878 there

Heme Hill, S E  
London  
19<sup>th</sup> Dec. 77

My dear Sir

I am sure you know  
as well as I that the best  
message for any of your young  
men who really are trying  
to read their Bibles - is -  
whatever they choose first to  
read - in whatever morning.

But here's a Pagan message  
for them - which will be a  
grandly harmonized bass for  
whatever words they get <sup>on the New Year?</sup> -

Inter spem, curamque, - timores  
inter, at iras

Munus crede diem tibi

dilatasse supremum.

Yours faithfully  
J. Ruskin.

was no cheerful word; only two lines from Horace: Epistles I. 4, 12-13.

“Inter spem curamque, timores inter et iras  
*Omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum.*”

(“Amid hope and sorrow, amid fears and wrath, believe every day that has dawned upon thee to be thy last.”)

He must have been deeply distressed not to have cared to catch even the qualified optimism of Horace’s very next line—

“Grata superveniet quæ non sperabitur hora.”

(“Pleasant the advent of the unhopèd-for hour.”)

Trials drew close about Ruskin in that year, and at length ill-health compelled him to resign his Professorship, to which he had been re-elected in 1873. *Fors*, the Slade lectures, and a multitude of other interests had claimed his unremitting care, and the result was a new and most important body of literature. For the sake of keeping the record, the chief works may be merely named under their years, together with an indication of Ruskin’s later journeys at home and abroad.

In 1873 a lecture, “Nature and Authority,” was delivered at the Grosvenor Hotel; “Robin, Swallow, and Chough,” at Oxford and Eton. The Slade course for the year was the exquisite “Val d’Arno,” studies in Tuscan Art and Florentine History. In 1874 Ruskin revisited Rome, and went on to Sicily. His Slade course

included "Alps and Jura" and "Schools of Florentine Art." At Eton he lectured on Botticelli. In 1875 he gave the Royal Institution his lecture on "Glacial Action." The Slade course was "Sir Joshua Reynolds." At Eton he delivered the "Spanish Chapel." In 1876 he lectured at Christ's Hospital on "Precious Stones," and at Woolwich on "Minerals." The same year he made posting tours in England and revisited Switzerland. Part of 1877 was devoted to a study of Carpaccio at Venice. He lectured at Kendal on "Yewdale and its Streamlets." The Slade course was "Readings in Modern Painters." "Streams of Westmorland" was given at Eton. In 1878 Ruskin visited Prince Leopold, then very ill, at Windsor. At Hawarden he came to a better understanding of Mr. Gladstone, an incident generously recorded in *Fors*, and later in a reprint, when the space formerly containing some hard words was left forever blank and marked "A memorial of rash judgment." This was the year of the Turner Exhibition in Bond Street, for which Ruskin wrote a catalogue, interrupted by terrible illness, brought on by innumerable worries. On his recovery he had to face another ordeal—the libel action brought by Whistler for *Fors'* remarks on impressionism. Whistler received a farthing damages, and an inspiration, developed later in his "Gentle Art of Making Enemies."

For a considerable time Ruskin had to take life as easily as he might, but he was not idle. "Deucalion," studies of crystals, and "Proserpina," an original system of botany, came to birth in 1879. 1880 saw "A Cau-



tion to Snakes," suggested by Huxley's lecture on the evolution of reptiles. Ruskin's treatment of the subject was artistic and ethical. He wrote also his "Bible of Amiens," part of his unfinished project "Our Fathers have Told Us," and crossed swords with the Bishop of Manchester on the question of usury. The same year he revisited Abbeville, Amiens, Beauvais, Chartres, and Rouen. France and Italy were in the itinerary of 1882, and he gave his "Cistercian Architecture" before the Royal Institution. Next year he was invited to return to his Professorship, and delivered the "Art of England." This year he made his last tour in Scotland. The Slade course for 1884, the "Pleasures of England," marked his final work in Oxford. He got through it without the disaster his friends dreaded, and was persuaded to cancel certain lectures containing deep censure of the times. His lecture the "Storm-Cloud," given at the London Institution, was ominous in its title. For a time clouds and darkness closed about the mind of the foremost thinker of his age—foremost in every sense; for it was his mere outrunning of his own times that so set men against his teaching.

Gradually he recovered, and set to work again, writing at intervals from 1885 to 1888 his incomparable autobiography, *Præterita*, which he intended to bring down to the year 1879. But his work was done. At length he acknowledged that the task was beyond his powers, and with one final effort, his beautiful tribute to his cousin, Mrs. Arthur Severn, who had been his mother's companion in her last years, and who



was to watch over his own long passage towards those "Gates of the hills, whence one returns not," Ruskin laid down his pen forever.

But the pilgrimage had still twelve years to run. It is a period of which none should write save those who loved and watched over Ruskin in his declining days at Brantwood. From Mr. Collingwood, his secretary, one word may perhaps be borrowed here, so fitly does it sum up all that a writer from the outside world may dare to say:—

"'Datur Hora Quieti': there is more work to do, but not to-day. The plough stands in the furrow; and the labourer passes peacefully from his toil, homewards."

On the 20th of January 1900 the end came, without pain or farewell. He had wished, should he die at Brantwood, to be buried in Coniston Churchyard; and there he rests, his grave marked by a sculptured cross, of native stone, symbolically wrought by his own artificers to commemorate his life-work. There is no written epitaph, merely his name and the years of his coming and going.

Westminster Abbey would have opened her doors to receive his dust, but when the Dean offered a grave, the honour was declined. John Ruskin's true resting-place is by the Gates of the Hills.

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